

LISTING OF THE CLAIMS

This listing of claims replaces all prior versions and listings of claims in the application.

Claims 1–73 (Canceled)

74. (Currently Amended) A gaming system comprising:
~~a plurality of gaming machines, each machine having an input interface,
selectively joining a cooperative gaming environment, contributing a wager to join a cooperative
game in said environment, and allocating a winning amount from winning a said cooperative
game at a said gaming machine to a prize pool;~~
a plurality of gaming machines, wherein each machine includes an input interface
configured to:
selectively joining a cooperative gaming environment,
contribute to a wager to join the cooperative game in the cooperative
gaming environment,
providing an award from winnings obtained during the cooperative game;
a central control unit game controller, connected to said plurality of gaming
machines, and configured to:
interact with at least one of said input interfaces in order to present an
invitation to allow a person to accept the invitation to join a the cooperative gaming
environment;
receive information from one or more gaming machines indicating an
acceptance to join said cooperative gaming environment, said winning a wager amount at
each gaming machine, a change of said wager amount at each gaming machine, and a
change of a number of ~~said joined~~ gaming machines participating in a said cooperative
game of a said cooperative gaming environment;
establish at least one rule for a said cooperative game that can be played
by the cooperative gaming environment after the receipt of said acceptance;

interact with at least one visual display device of each of the gaming machine in order to present the at least one rule for the cooperative game to allow the person to accept said at least one rule prior to commencing the cooperative game;

interact with the at least one input interface of the gaming machine in order to present an option to allow the person to withdraw from the cooperative gaming environment prior to ending of gaming in the cooperative game as determined by the at least one rule group, to

respond to the withdrawal of the person from the cooperative gaming environment by allowing all games in progress to be completed and recording a status of all credit meters and a current amount won to determine a final amount that is to be distributed to each player, and

complete a said cooperative game that is already in progress at said participating gaming machine in response to a withdrawal of said gaming machine from said cooperative gaming environment or to said change of wager, to record said winning amount, and to record said change, subsequent to presenting the at least one rule to the person and prior to commencing a new said cooperative game; and

distribute said prize pool current amount won based on a number of joined gaming machines and said winning the current amount won.

75. (Previously presented) The gaming system of claim 74, wherein the game controller is further configured to:

determine whether there is at least a minimum number of persons joined in the cooperative gaming environment; and

allow the cooperative game to commence if it is determined that the minimum number of persons have joined the cooperative gaming environment.

76. (Previously Presented) The gaming system of claim 74, wherein the game controller is configured such that establishing the at least one rule comprises:

interacting with the at least one visual display device in order to prompt the person to provide rule information; and

establishing the at least one rule based on the rule information.

77. (Previously Presented) The gaming system of claim 74, wherein the game controller is configured to interact with the at least one input interface in order to allow the person to specify how much the person wishes to wager during play of the cooperative game.

78. (Canceled)

79. (Previously Presented) The gaming system of claim 74, wherein the game controller is further configured to establish the at least one rule after allow the person to join.

80. (Previously presented) The gaming system of claim 74, wherein the game controller is further configured to allow a person to withdraw from the cooperative gaming environment after presenting the at least one rule.

81. (Canceled)

82. (Previously presented) The gaming system of claim 74, wherein the game controller is further configured to allow changing the at least one rule.

83. (Previously presented) The gaming system of claim 74, wherein the game controller is further configured to present another rule during the cooperative game.

84. (Currently amended) A gaming system comprising:
a control unit arranged to control play of a cooperative gaming environment;
a plurality of gaming machines linked to the control unit, each gaming machine being arranged to contribute a wager amount in order to join the cooperative gaming environment and such that wins resulting from individual cooperative games played by gaming machines participating in the cooperative gaming environment are allocated to at least one prize pool, wherein during play of the cooperative game, the control unit is further arranged to:

(a) monitor gaming machine operation to determine a change to at least one of an amount wagered by any one of the gaming machines and a number of the gaming machines participating in the cooperative gaming environment;

(b) in response to detecting an occurrence of the change, allowing any individual games that were in progress at the time of the occurrence of the change to be

completed prior to recording a credit meter status and win amount for each of the gaming machines since the last change; and

(c) determine a prize pool distribution amount for each of the participating gaming machines based on the status and win amounts recorded for the respective gaming machines since joining the cooperative gaming environment in response to detecting the occurrence of the change.

85. (Canceled)

86. (Previously presented) The system of claim 84 in which the control unit includes a rules-establishing module for establishing rules of the cooperative gaming environment, the rules determining general operating conditions of the cooperative gaming environment.

87. (Previously presented) The system of claim 86 in which the rules-establishing module relies, at least in part, on player input in establishing the rules.

88. (Previously presented) The system of claim 87 in which the rules relate to requirements for new players entering the gaming environment and existing players exiting the cooperative gaming environment.

89. (Previously presented) The system of claim 86 further comprising a display arranged to display the established rules of the cooperative gaming environment.

90. (Previously presented) The system of claim 84, wherein the control unit further comprises an allocating module for allocating the individual games.

91. (Previously presented) The system of claim 90, wherein the allocating module allocates a mixture of higher volatility and lower volatility individual games such that there is an even distribution of gaming machine volatility in the cooperative gaming environment.

92. (Previously presented) The system of claim 84 in which the control unit allows players of the participating gaming machines to adopt different game play strategies so that risk is distributed between the players.

93. (Previously presented) The system of claim 84, wherein a separate prize pool is maintained for each of the participating gaming machines.

94. The system of claim 93, wherein the control unit is further arranged to carry out steps (b) and (c) in response to determining a zero credit meter balance for any one of the participating gaming machines.

Claims 95–102 (Canceled)